

ANIMAL KINGDOM CROWNED CHAMPION 3-YEAR-OLD ON MONDAY NIGHT DERBY WINNER REIGNS AS FIRST AMERICAN CHAMPION FOR TEAM VALOR MARK POLIVKA ACCEPTS TROPHY AT ECLIPSE AWARDS IN BEVERLY HILLS

Animal Kingdom's Kentucky Derby triumph resonated as the deciding factor in the most dramatic category at the 41st Eclipse Awards ceremony on Monday night in Beverly Hills, as the Team Valor International home-bred prevailed as champion 3-year-old male of 2011.

Despite missing the second half of the year, the chestnut colt received 114 of 237 first-place votes (48 percent) to edge Breeders' Cup Dirt Mile winner Caleb's Posse by 3 votes in one of the closest results in Eclipse Awards history.

Animal Kingdom is the first American champion for Team Valor International, which also garnered 25 first-place votes as a finalist in the category for outstanding owner, won by Ken and Sarah Ramsey. Barry Irwin's Kentucky-based partnership group has previously raced champions or highweights in Canada, England, Ireland, Italy, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates.

Mark Polivka, a long-time partner with Team Valor, accepted the trophy from actress and horse racing enthusiast Bo Derek.

"I don't know what is more unnerving, winning the Eclipse Award or being on stage with Bo Derek," Polivka said, starting off with one of the best lines of the night. "I want to thank Barry Irwin, who isn't here today. Barry bred him and literally had his fingerprints all over this horse. I want to thank Graham Motion, who did just an outstanding job, bringing him up to run just an unbelievable race in his first race on dirt. I want to thank Johnny Velazquez and the entire team at Team Valor. All the folks there make it a great experience. I want to thank Graham's entire team. Dave Rock did a great job with the horse, all of the people in Graham's barn helped us achieve the ultimate in racing."

Polivka also read a prepared statement from Irwin, who was unable to attend the event.

"Most times, when owners win a race, any race, they have a tough time getting complete satisfaction," Irwin said. "For us to win the Kentucky Derby was a miracle. Most years, the running of the Derby more resembles a rodeo than a horse race. This year was different. The race was cleanly run without excuses. To win the race and enjoy full satisfaction is a blessing that is most appreciated and totally unexpected."



Barry Irwin leads Animal Kingdom and jockey John Velazquez into the Kentucky Derby winner's circle.